

YOUTH EXPERIENCES IN JEWELLERY-MAKING



Save the Children

IMPROVING WORK POTENTIAL
AND OPPORTUNITIES
OF YOUTH IN CAUCA
AND NARIÑO, COLOMBIA

BVLGARI
ROMA

CREDITS

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INTRODUCTION

The present document, produced by Save the Children Canada, provides a succinct overview of the Bulgari-funded jewellery-making project, formally named *Improving Work Potential and Opportunities of Youth in Cauca and Nariño*. It does so by describing the history of the project, and its particular geo-political and development context, as well as focusing on key achievements, based on the experiences recounted by youth beneficiaries and other project stakeholders, including teachers, parents, educational staff, consultants and Save the Children and partner staff, as well as through key project documents. A particular focus is given to Gender Equality and the gender norms in this region. This was identified as a critical factor for the success of the project by both the youth participants and other stakeholders. Finally, key learnings and recommendations are presented to address the identified challenges and opportunities.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology focused on a qualitative analysis of interviews and focus group data, as well as an analysis of secondary sources including past project reports. In the summer of 2016, the authors of this document travelled to Colombia and held 17 interviews and one focus group discussion with youth beneficiaries and key stakeholders of the project, in Barbacoas, Medellín, Cali and Bogotá (see breakdown in Table 1). This methodology was chosen to promote a participatory process soliciting active feedback from beneficiaries and key stakeholders on the experience of the project and its achievements. Key guiding questions sought to gauge the educational relevance of the project and its usefulness in promoting livelihood opportunities, the development of professional and life skills, positive outlook and self-esteem, and cultural preservation. A key limitation of this research is that it does not provide a comprehensive assessment of project outcomes including quantitative analysis. Instead the research serves to synthesize the key perceptions among youth beneficiaries and project stakeholders on the impacts of the program on youth and the larger community (and how these may be different for males and females), while capturing the institutional memory of the project as it evolved over several years.

**BREAKDOWN OF INTERVIEW
AND FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS**

INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
Youth Beneficiaries	6	1	7
Partners/Consultants	1	2	3
Educational staff	4	1	5
Save the Children staff	2	1	3
Parents	0	2	2
TOTAL	13	7	20



BIRTH AND EVOLUTION OF THE YOUTH JEWELLERY PROJECT IN COLOMBIA

In 2012 Bulgari approached Save the Children to develop an innovative youth project in Colombia promoting entrepreneurship in jewellery-making. The remote town of Barbacoas in Colombia's Pacific southwest region (department of Nariño) was selected as the location for this project, given its rich history in jewellery-making. Barbacoas was one of the first places where the ancestral filigree jewellery tradition in Colombia began. Reachable through a five hour journey from the nearest major road on a single bumpy unpaved road that traverses jungle and mountain ranges, Barbacoas' geographic isolation is reflective of the absence of basic services for its residents – including lack of potable water and intermittent energy. Situated in one of the country's conflict hotspots where residents have lived under the pressure of guerrilla and paramilitary groups vying for control of the region to safeguard drug-trafficking operations, Barbacoas' development has been particularly impacted by conflict and violence. This has resulted in murders of civilians, mass displacement and recruitment of children and young people to armed groups. There have been few opportunities available to youth to earn an income outside of mining and involvement in illegal armed groups and crime. Within this context, the project identified a fertile ground for transformation, helping to open up possibilities and dreams of young people offering a positive, feasible and dignified alternative livelihood option while developing transferable

life skills and promoting cultural preservation. It has since been expanded into the towns of Guapi and Tumaco, also situated in the region and facing similar development challenges.

SAVE THE CHILDREN'S EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN COLOMBIA

The Bulgari-funded jewellery project was incorporated as part of Save the Children's larger education interventions in Colombia's southwest including the earlier *Aprendiendo Crecerenos* project and the current *Vive la Educación* project,¹ both supported through Global Affairs Canada and co-implemented with the Norwegian Refugee Council. This larger education program is working to enhance the life opportunities of conflict-affected and vulnerable girls, boys and youth in Colombia's southwest through improved equitable access and quality of education, while also strengthening the performance of government education authorities in delivering quality and gender-sensitive education services. The Bulgari-funded jewellery project aligns with and is working to advance one of the program's key outcomes for youth entrepreneurship and productivity while also helping to preserve the ancestral craft of filigree jewellery-making.

¹ Two successive projects formally known as *Promotion and protection of the right to education and participation of children and youth in the Department of Nariño – Colombia (Aprendiendo Crecerenos)*, from 2008 to 2013, and *Protecting Children's Education in Southwest Colombia (Vive la Educación)*, from 2013 to 2019.

FROM EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITY TO SIGNATURE CURRICULUM

The jewellery project began as a workshop and extracurricular activity identified within the Institutional Education Project of the Luiz Irizar School in Barbacoas as a key vocational area to be developed, with a focus on grades 9 through 11. A strategic alliance with Artesanías de Colombia – a public-private corporation, a branch of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Tourism of Colombia that promotes and contributes to the progress and development of traditional handicrafts – engaged master trainers and facilitated the training of students in filigree jewellery-making and quality control measures. Today the project has evolved to be an integral academic component of a comprehensive and integrated educational plan that is embedded within the education system for multiple levels of students – a signature curriculum that the school community has taken ownership of and that is led by a formal jewellery teacher from the community. In line with Colombian public policies, this signature curriculum is rooted within a Community Education Project that seeks to integrate education relevant to the learning needs and aspirations of Afro-Colombian communities while recognizing the ancestral knowledge and histories of these communities. The project has thus become embedded as an ethno-educational project under the ethno-development and productivity theme of the departmental policy PRETAN,² which promotes entrepreneurship and productive activities recognizing cultural knowledge and history.

INTEGRATING THE FILIGREE JEWELLERY-MAKING TRADITION INTO CULTURALLY-RELEVANT STUDY PLANS

Filigree jewellery has become recognized as a heritage of the community that should be preserved and leveraged through the educational system. The plan of study involves theoretical and practical content according to set standards. From Grade 6 onward it is a subject that students attend weekly for one hour in the jewellery workshop donated by the project; additionally, it is included in other academic areas, linking jewellery with multiple subjects including the arts (in the generation of designs), natural sciences (in the measurement of materials and chemicals involved in the process as well as melting points of metals involved in crafting jewellery) and mathematics (including the accounting and marketing related to the business of jewellery-making and selling). Rooted in reviving and further cultivating near-lost Barbacoan traditions, this educational focus is in accordance with the needs and desired direction of the Afro-Colombian community in Barbacoas.



² Spanish acronym for *Proyecto etno-educativo afro-nariñoense*, i.e. Ethno-educational Project for Afro-Nariño.

YOUTH ASSOCIATION PROMOTES YOUTH ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT VIA JEWELLERY-MAKING

In 2012, in addition to providing ongoing support to the school component, the project facilitated the forming of a youth association³ in Barbacoas to collaborate on the production and sale of filigree jewellery. Ongoing support from Artesanías de Colombia ensured support to the association to participate in major artisanal fairs held in Colombia's large cities.⁴ In addition, in 2013, two youth from the project traveled to La Paz, Bolivia to share experiences with Bolivian youth participating in a similar Bulgari-financed project in jewellery-making, and in 2016 one youth was flown to Rome to visit Bulgari's workshops, engage with jewellers, and learn new techniques. When he returned to Barbacoas, he brought back concepts and suggestions on marketing and the organization of roles in production and administrative areas. Through the project, the youth association received support from expert consultants to undertake market studies, workshops on commercialization, and support to legally establish the youth association. Members of the youth association have participated actively in this process gaining greater ownership over the project, including developing their own brand (naming it Mambi after a river in the region) and influencing the design of packaging. Several core members have remained active in the association, while other youth have since moved on, pursuing alternate opportunities. As examined in the section that follows, the business of jewellery-making has offered a concrete vocational option to participating

youth, who have integrated this into their long-term life projects, or as a pathway to realize dreams and advance forward, leveraging the experience gained, skills developed and income generated to pursue their dreams, such as completing higher education.

EXPANSION FROM BARBACOAS TO GUAPI AND TUMACO

In 2016 the project expanded to two new areas in Colombia, Guapi and Tumaco, characterized by similar traditions in jewellery-making and similar obstacles to youth livelihoods including lack of employment opportunities and security challenges. Key lessons learned to date in Barbacoas have been applied to strengthen program delivery and impact in Guapi and Tumaco. For example, based on challenges with group cohesion and gender equality experienced in Barbacoas, as well as Save the Children's knowledge and methodologies developed in a similar project in Bolivia, the project in Guapi and Tumaco has incorporated a greater emphasis on group work and building group cohesion skills prior to initiating technical training in jewellery-making. It has had a greater focus on strengthening transferable life skills including improving leadership and self-esteem, planning life projects and developing business ventures. In addition, gender needs have been assessed in the present phase of the project, as discussed in greater in the Gender Equality section below, to ensure the project's relevance and benefit to boys and girls alike. These challenges are further elaborated in the Working Towards Gender Equality and Key Learnings sections below.

³ Originally the youth association drew from a pool of students participating in the Jewellery-making classes in the school, in grades 10 and 11, aged roughly between 16 and 20. This large age range is due to documented high drop-out and desertion rates in the region, due to many complex reasons, including child and youth work, early pregnancy, and migration, all discussed below.

⁴ Between 2013 and 2016 youth participated in the Expo-artesánías fair in Bogotá and the Expo-artesano fair in Medellín.





SUCCESSES OF THE JEWELLERY-MAKING PROJECT

PROMOTING DIGNIFIED LIVELIHOOD OPPORTUNITIES IN A CHALLENGING CONTEXT

Jewellery-making is seen by youth participants and community members interviewed as a positive and concrete livelihood opportunity for young people in Barbacoas, who face limited employment options. Of the employment opportunities that exist in the context, there are clear differentiations of work by gender - for men work opportunities include artisanal gold mining, working as a driver/motorcycle taxi, working as a store clerk, or involvement in illegal activities such as coca cultivation. For women this mainly includes jobs in the service sector such as beauty salons and restaurants, and selling various products in the market place. However, through their participation in the project, several youth now plan to continue with the work of the association or opening up their own small business in jewellery-making as part of their long-term plans (either in Barbacoas or at a national or international level). For others, the opportunity to make and sell jewellery has presented a solid pathway towards achieving other goals such as attending university and pursuing studies as diverse as environmental studies, economics, psychology and music. One young man who was part of the project used his earnings to pursue higher education in accounting in one of Colombia's larger cities,

where he now works with a jewellery company when he is not studying, and continues to design and produce his own filigree jewellery on the side. This has shown the relevance of the project in enabling youth to transfer the skills gained in new contexts. Although the youth association has fulfilled a number of orders from individual and corporate clients, to date, participation in artisanal fairs held in big cities like Bogota and Medellin have provided the main avenue for jewellery sales. In 2015 they achieved a break-even point in their business. Moving forward there is a prioritization on developing a growth strategy including diversified clientele that includes an emphasis on local sales, which has so far been lacking from the activities of the youth association.

SHIFTING MINDSET OF YOUTH AND FOSTERING AGENCY

Numerous youth beneficiaries and stakeholders interviewed echoed the same powerful sentiment: that young people's participation in this project empowers them to believe in themselves and motivates them to advance their own lives. A personal transformation has been observed in the life of participants as a result of this project. It offers youth an opportunity to shift their perspective of reality in a subtle but palpable way, broadening their vision of the world

and developing an alternative outlook that provides a pathway to achieve goals, articulate dreams and realize them. For young men and women who grew up in the remote town of Barbacoas or its surroundings and may never have travelled, the opportunity to visit one of Colombia's major cities to sell the jewellery they made in an artisanal fair, or to travel to Bolivia to participate in a learning exchange with youth from a similar program, is a momentous journey that can be life-changing and provide a wealth of new experiences. One of the project trainers reflected on the socio-cultural dimensions of youths' lived experiences as Afro-Colombians, an ethnic group that has been socially and politically excluded from Colombia's development, receiving little state support. Historically subject to systemic inequities and marginalization, with exposure to violence often experienced in communities or in the home, youth have been vulnerable to adopting a pessimistic outlook that can too often lead to a future of failure. The project has provided a response to this phenomenon that helps youth to awaken to their dreams and believe in themselves, transcending their own situations in order to pursue their goals. While their peers may be involved in recreational

or athletic pursuits rarely generating income or leading towards any certain career path, project stakeholders have commented that youth participating in this project have become positive role models for others, representing advancement toward a concrete goal with maturity, professionalism and entrepreneurship. Many have expressed the desire to pass on the knowledge they have gained in filigree jewellery-making by teaching others the skills they have learned.

Save the Children's global experience in economic empowerment work with adolescents and youth has demonstrated the importance of fostering agency among adolescents affected by poverty and experiencing deprivation. This project has fostered agency through mutually reinforcing building blocks including the integration of employability and life skills, as well as efforts to maximize youth participation, for example in the creation of the youth association and its structure, and in the design of the brand, logo and packaging, all of which build youth's own agency and ensure ownership over the project.

SEBASTIÁN'S STORY*

In the beginning, I was not very interested. In grade 11, I had too much homework to do, too large a load. But there were many people who motivated me and I started taking the classes. I was never absent, and began to grow. I was interested in the cultural aspect, and reviving the history of the region. I ended up joining the association too, for one year.

I learned many things, and became good at filigree. I also got to travel to Bolivia, see other people, in other parts of the world, who had this drive and motivation to advance themselves. I realized that each region has something distinct that identifies it, and for Barbacoas that is filigree. So, I wanted to let people know what Barbacoan filigree is, and about our culture and history.

I used to be someone who was afraid to speak, but now I have a talent and confidence, and I have learned to speak up and sell my products. I saved up some money from my sales, and decided to go, to take a step ahead and do something more. Now, I am in Cali, studying accounting, and at the same time continuing to make jewellery and selling it through a small business, as well as through my own networks. I am also teaching others how to make jewellery. It is marvelous to be able to pass on your knowledge to others.

I thank Bulgari, Artesanías de Colombia, and Save the Children, because if I had not been involved in this project, I would not have had the opportunity to do what I am doing. In the future, I want to open my own business and teach other youth.

** Name has been changed to protect the young person's privacy and identity.*



GAINING TRANSFERABLE SKILLS (TECHNICAL, BUSINESS, LIFE SKILLS)

Young people participating in this project have gained a broad range of skills that are transferable and can be applied in other contexts:

The **technical skills** learned in jewellery-making and quality control of production are quite advanced, taught under the guidance of skilled trainers from Artesanías de Colombia. Youth are now capable designers of rings, bracelets and necklaces, and their use of silver versus gold (which hides errors) in jewellery-making has forced youth to become even more technically competent than many traditional jewellers, resulting in minimal errors in their products. Youth have been successful in demonstrating quality and diversity of designs in the jewellery pieces produced for artisanal fairs, integrating modern sensibilities with the traditional craft. Envisioning a jewellery design and bringing this design to life has been exhilarating for youth and provided a much-welcomed creative outlet. The skills developed in jewellery-making and the talent and creativity cultivated can be transferable to other contexts where one can be employed as a filigree jeweller or run a small business selling jewellery.

“Making filigree jewellery fills my life with **positivity. The ability to express my ideas and thoughts through a piece of jewellery is beautiful.”**

- Youth Participant

The **business skills** attained have nurtured a business-oriented outlook, providing youth with the skills to succeed in promoting their work and business that can be transferable to other contexts, even outside of the jewellery business. Such skills include establishing a youth business association and dividing work into specific roles, managing a small business enterprise, managing money, taking inventory of stock, procurement planning, product presentation, marketing, assessing profit versus loss, planning and problem-solving, developing business plans, building entrepreneurship capacity, and developing competencies in usage of computers and excel software. Critical soft skills for business include developing a sense of accountability, utilizing expressive communication, nurturing leadership among youth, and working within a team (a skill that was further strengthened in later phases). Youth now demonstrate a high degree of professionalism in their approach to work, which exceeds that of the traditional

“Every day I’m more responsible with everything I do. It has been the result of being part of this process. It has **transformed me to become a person that is more active, responsible and conscientious.”**

- Youth Participant

jewellers. This is most reflected in the changes observed among youth participating in the first artisanal fair until now: their movements, interactions with customers and story-telling capability reflects a heightened understanding and dexterity in product presentation, sales and client relations.

Life skills have also been a critical learning area for youth in this project, transferable to all areas of life. Youth have developed positive self-esteem, confidence to interact with clients, maturity, responsibility and discipline, an orientation toward the fulfillment of goals, teamwork capacity, time management skills, respect for the diverse opinions of others, and the ability to be self-critical and improve oneself. Life skills are crucial for economic empowerment and provide a foundation to mitigate livelihood barriers, but the benefits gained extend beyond economic empowerment alone.

Despite demonstrating technical skills and talent from the start, previously youth did not have a vision of growth, the capacity to express themselves well, the inclination to communicate with clients, or the sense of accountability for their work. They now feel more responsible, believe in their business and develop projections for what they want to produce for the fairs.



REVIVING CULTURE THROUGH EDUCATION AND SKILLS TRAINING IN THE FILIGREE TRADITION

From its inception, the project emphasized the cultural richness of the region with the design of unique Afro-Colombian jewellery pieces. Prior to participating in this project, many youth were lacking knowledge of their culture's rich history in jewellery-making and filigree. They have since learned to appreciate it as part of their own identity and that of their municipality, understanding filigree as a tradition rooted in their culture, a tradition at risk of being lost. Students recognize the production of filigree jewellery as an activity that connects with the knowledge of their elders and economic activities predominant in the past. They are empowered to contribute to the larger objective of cultural preservation and participate actively in this process. This also points to an almost spiritual aspect of the project: a mission to revitalize something important that was on the brink of extinction even among master jewellers themselves. Youth have become proud ambassadors of their town and cultural heritage, transmitting the story of Barbacoas, now recognized in national and international spheres. The project has successfully leveraged rich cultural capital to promote a productive activity that is building economic opportunity while strengthening cultural pride in the community.

BUILDING YOUTH SELF-PROTECTION CAPACITIES IN THE CONTEXT OF CONFLICT

Project participants and stakeholders have highlighted the usefulness of the jewellery project in building self-protection capacities and preventing youth participation in conflict. The provision of concrete alternative livelihood options are helping to prevent youth (particularly male youth, as highlighted in the Gender Equality section below) from joining armed groups or engaging in illegal activities. Male youth working in the association commented that sales from jewellery-making provides a source of earnings that

enables them to live in tranquility with a low profile in a zone where armed groups are active, and protecting themselves from associated dangers and risks. Having youth occupied and empowered to participate in positive initiatives that they feel ownership over and are invested in provides a protective dimension to idle youth vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups and crime, and presents a substantive contribution to the community given the context. Some youth participants have faced particular vulnerabilities and have had family members displaced, disappeared or killed after becoming tied up in illegal activities (such as the murder of a brother in the case of one youth project member). There is a perception that some young people involved in the association now might have become involved in the armed conflict if it was not for the project providing an alternative opportunity. It is thus a means to provide self-protection and empower youth in positive ways to believe in themselves and advance forward in the midst of a complex and sensitive context. The project has presented an alternative, legal, honest, dignified and safe life pathway that contrasts from the limited options youth have in Barbacoas and the surrounding region. It is motivating young people in the context of conflict to visualize a dignified life that enables them to live in peace and minimize the cycle of violence.

DEVELOPMENT OF COLLABORATIVE AND COMPLEMENTARY PARTNERSHIPS

Effective partnerships have been critical to the success of this initiative. The collaboration of **Artesanías de Colombia** has been key to strengthening technical skills in jewellery-making as well as marketing and sales, through their experience in promoting entrepreneurial projects with a cultural artisanal component and the ongoing support and training provided over several years. They have brought the technical know-how, a team of jewellery experts and teachers, certification in jewellery-making, innovative design and their experience of commercializing jewellery-making. **Save the Children's** long-term work with children and youth in

PROTECTING YOUTH FROM ARMED GROUPS

"As it is a zone of conflict, if our youth do not have a skill or something to do, the armed groups start to lure them, 'come on, I'll pay you.' Many kids left the community because they offered them money. But when they are out there they realize it is not a reality that they imagined, and they find they can no longer get out. Projects like these keep youth occupied with an idea about life, with a future option, with measurable goals. An occupied youth is more challenging a target to be recruited by armed groups, criminals, and drug traffickers... if our region was full of these sustainable projects I think many boys in the ranks would be enjoying their families today and contributing to society that growth that we are looking for in this community. I thank Save the Children for bringing these messages of peace."

- Academic Coordinator

education within the zone has enabled very remote and vulnerable communities to be reached and has provided close accompaniment to the process given that Artesanías de Colombia staff do not travel regularly. Save the Children's determined outreach with youth and communities has helped to garner interest and ensure continuity of the initiative. The constant presence and support of Save the Children in such a distant part of the country is seen as a key strength of the project; the organization has been viewed as an ally of these remote communities, whose residents may feel left out of the benefits of the country's larger development.

Additionally, **educational institutions** – including dedicated teachers and administrative staff – have been critical to the evolution of this project and its ability to provide relevant education and training to young people that connects them with their culture and history. As noted above, this can be best understood in the context of larger educational projects, such as *Aprendiendo Creemos* and *Vive la Educación*, which are funded by **Global Affairs Canada**, and co-implemented by Save the Children and the **Norwegian Refugee Council**. These projects have permitted Save the Children to

establish itself as a key player in the education sphere in Colombia, consolidating its relationship and collaboration with the Ministry of Education, and departmental **Secretariats of Education**, as well as local authorities and community-based organizations. In the current phase, the project has added an additional component, helping youth from six schools apply life skills and demonstrate improved entrepreneurship and business skills as part of productive pedagogical projects in art, culture and local trades. This includes the production of musical instruments, arts and crafts with recycled materials, agriculture and farming.

Furthermore, **external consultants** have been critical in strengthening business-specific components, such as client-vendor relations, and helping to shape the establishment of the youth association and orient them to roles and responsibilities. Most importantly, **Bulgari** has been the impetus and facilitator of this process and the positive transformation that has occurred in the lives of youth touched through the intervention, providing the financial support to enable the initiative to flourish.





WORKING TOWARDS GENDER EQUALITY

Through the interviews conducted with the young men and women, and other stakeholders of the jewellery-making project in Barbacoas, a striking picture began to form of the complexities of gender roles and norms in this region and particular context, in the jewellery sector, and the implications of these on the program. It was decided to include a section dedicated to Gender Equality, in order to highlight the particular challenges that were faced by the project, the solutions adopted, and the ongoing work towards a transformative gender approach. An in-depth analysis would uncover a highly complex picture as Colombia ranks 95th internationally on the UNDP's Gender Development Index which measures gender disparities between men and women in 188 countries in three basic dimensions of human development: health, knowledge and living standards.⁵ Even within Colombia there are disparities between regions, and between rural and urban settings, further exacerbated by years of armed conflict. However, this document does not provide a full-fledged gender analysis; rather, it offers a reflection based on the experiences shared by the youth beneficiaries and stakeholders. The recommendations in the subsequent section highlight necessary steps to identify and address the gaps particularly related to this program.

GENDER ROLES AND NORMS IN BARBACOAS

While there are nuanced perceptions among participants, in general there was a consistent understanding and agreement on gender

roles and their effects on the youth. There was wide agreement that adolescent and young women have more chores and responsibilities in the home, and less time than young men for leisurely activities. Some evidence that was cited by the majority of those interviewed was the high prevalence of teen pregnancy, single parenthood and resulting dropout of young mothers from school and other activities reflected in the life plans of many young women being limited to getting married, having two or three children, and obtaining service jobs such as painting nails, or becoming sellers in local markets. There was striking unanimity on the expectation that a large number of adolescent and young men would become fathers at an early age, with the best-case scenario involving them taking responsibility for their children and family and looking for work in urban centres. A more likely scenario presents the large majority of male youth with one of two choices: to be idle and hang out in their streets without much in the way of life plans or future prospects; or to involve themselves in illicit work, like illegal mining, deforestation, coca cultivation and the drug trade, with a high likelihood that a significant number of them would eventually be recruited by an armed group, who could lure them in by offering them money and a sense of power.

Almost all stakeholders from the region interviewed reported having had themselves or someone close to them, including members of their immediate family, experience violence, receive threats, disappear or be killed, though it is important to note that boys and girls are targeted and affected differently by the conflict.

⁵ <http://hdr.undp.org/en/composite/GDI>. The index was published in: Jahan, S. (2016). *Human Development Report 2016: Human Development for Everyone*.

GENDER AND MIGRATION

The only viable alternative consistently shared by the participants, is for children, adolescents and youth from rural zones to move away from their families to nearby towns or large cities in order to find a way to earn a living, as few prospects exist for them in Barbacoas and its more rural surrounding townships. For young children this means they may have to go live with a relative,⁶ or even a stranger who essentially adopts them and takes charge of their schooling and well-being. Adolescents and youth on the other hand, often leave their communities in small groups of siblings or friends and find a place to stay together and work and/or go to school, with the oldest male taking on the responsibility of the group and their well-being, essentially acting as a surrogate father figure. Some young men expressed their respect and indebtedness to these older father-like figures among their peers. However, it is evident that age and gender roles have an importance in the lives of these youth. Some positive effects of these roles could be the existence of a support structure for displaced and migrant youth, and care and protection mechanisms resembling family structures; however, negative effects include the reproduction and reinforcement of negative patriarchal gender roles, power differentials, and gender-based violence.

GENDER NORMS AND STEREOTYPES IN JEWELLERY-MAKING

Given the pervasiveness of gender roles and stereotypes in the lives of these adolescents and youth, it is not surprising to see the

prevalence and decisive role they play in their education and work, and in their participation and success in the jewellery-making program. Jewellery-making as a profession in the region has historically been viewed as a male domain, and more specifically of older men. Though all participants verified this existing gender bias, two pieces of anecdotal evidence provided an important testimony for its impact on female professionals in the field:

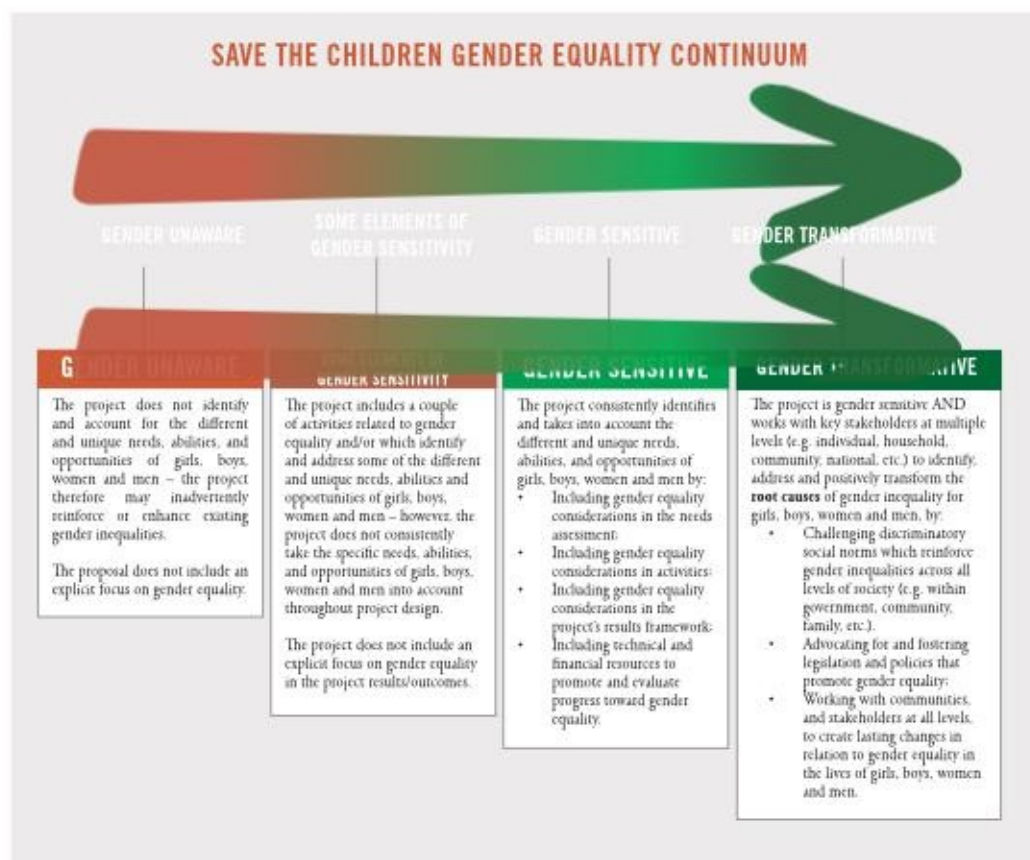
- The first came from a middle-aged female master jeweller and trainer from Artesanías de Colombia, who had personal experience in Quibdó, in the Department of Chocó, also in the Pacific Southwest, where she had travelled to deliver a training, and had male artisans reject her as a trainer due to her being a woman. She did finally manage to gain their respect and attention, but only after exhibiting her skills, thus proving her value and worth as a trainer.
- The second came from a male administrative educational staff member from Barbacoas, who, conversely, showed profound respect for a female jeweller from Mompox, another Afro-Colombian town near the Atlantic North well known for its filigree. According to his account, this female jeweller, who had come to Barbacoas as part of an exchange, was extremely intelligent, dynamic, charismatic and left an impression on everyone. Fascinatingly, according to him, she seemed to have the *'strength of a man'*. In other words, it was such an alien concept to see a woman so powerful and skillful in this field that he attributed male characteristics to her.

⁶ In the afro-Colombian culture the family concept is extensive, including relatives of second and third degree: these bonds are strong and children and youth often go to live with families in other towns or cities.



YOUNG WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE JEWELLERY-MAKING PROGRAM

Taking all of the above into consideration, the likelihood of girls and young women joining the jewellery-making program, whether in school or through the youth association, or even developing an interest in jewellery-making was quite low. Therefore, at the outset of the program, the implementation team and school staff took preliminary steps to ensure girls' participation, and managed to have a roughly equal number of males and females sign up for the association. However, predictably, many girls dropped out quite quickly since equal registration does not necessarily lead to equal participation and success, especially in the absence of an in-depth gender analysis to address the specific needs of girls and boys. Without this, programs are considered *Gender Unaware* according to the Save the Children Gender Equality Continuum included in Save the Children's Gender Equality Program Guidance & Toolkit⁷ rolled out in 2014. This increases the likelihood that they may "inadvertently reinforce gender inequalities and miss opportunities... to enhance gender equality and achieve more impactful and sustainable project outcomes" (p.15).



⁷ Save the Children (2014). *Engendering Transformatioal Change: Gender Equality Program Guidance and Toolkit*. This Program Guidance and Toolkit is the main tool and reference for Save the Children to consistently, meaningfully and strategically integrate gender equality focus across programming work. This is based on the Save the Children Gender Equality Policy.

According to the feedback from participants, the decline in girls' participation in the program can be attributed to many complex reasons. Some of the reoccurring themes discussed included: the reproduction of gender stereotypes in the relationships and power differentials among members; lack of group cohesion and exclusion of some members from decision-making by the mostly-male executive; aggressiveness among young men, with a few occasions cited where it had even lead to physical violence; and, in general, a patronizing attitude towards young women, who were perceived as inherently weaker and less capable of tasks requiring physical labour, thus requiring the care and protection of the young men. This resulted in a prescribed segregation of tasks, inhibiting their possibilities for growth in the long-term.

Surprisingly, the lack of practices promoting gender equality within the association were identified and recognized to some extent by all participants, both male and female, who saw the need to value and respect the contributions of girls and young women, and to support their participation to succeed. However, there was quite an interesting array of opinions on the how:

- A popular opinion amongst the young men interviewed was that there should be a division of labour in the association with men involved in production and hard physical work, and women involved in non-physical work such as communications and design. This, according to the young male president of the association was because women were more innovative in design; and though he did not think they were weaker, they should however be better taken care of.
- Some adults in the region, including parents, teachers and staff, believed that girls should be more motivated, or even pushed by parents to participate more, and that though this may be difficult at first, they would eventually learn to appreciate it, especially if they could succeed in gaining a livelihood out of it.
- A slightly more nuanced approach was presented by a young female consultant from outside the region, who believed it would be good to tailor the program to the current needs and preferences of girls and young women. For example, since girls did not seem to like manual production nor excel in it, perhaps the program could create more opportunities to involve them in other aspects they were interested in, like marketing.

- Finally, a truly gender-transformative approach was presented by a young male consultant trained in Guapi, another town in the Pacific Coast where this Bulgari-funded jewellery-making project is also being implemented. In his words (translated):

The first thing that needs to happen is to highlight the existing skills of these girls, so that they realize their capabilities. The exclusion of the past was not due to a lack of capacities, but rather a problem related to male ego and sexism, which did not permit them to realize the capacities of women. Therefore, training would need to focus on changing perceptions, so that girls see themselves as masters of their own destiny, and that young men and young women understand that the activities they take on should not be based on their gender, but rather on their individual capabilities.⁸

JEWELLERY-MAKING AS A VIABLE LIVELIHOOD FOR YOUNG WOMEN

Another important theme that is closely related to understanding and addressing the needs, abilities and opportunities of girls and women, in comparison to those of boys and young men, is the ability of the jewellery-making program to provide them with a viable livelihood. As highlighted above, the youth beneficiaries have identified a number of positive impacts of the project on their lives. However, it was abundantly clear that the aforementioned impacts of the association were experienced in a differentiated manner by male and female participants. Given that the association has not yet reached a level of sustainability to be able to provide a steady salary to all of its members, many young people did not see it as a viable livelihood option, and left quite quickly. Though this was the case for both males and females, it seemed to be especially important for young women, including a number of young mothers, who required a steady income to cover their responsibilities for their families and children. Therefore, their early desertion could at least partially be explained by their relative ease in finding other decent work alternatives, selling various products in the market, or doing nails, and making a modest steady salary the equivalent of about 7 US dollars per day. Whereas for young men, as highlighted above, there are still not many decent and safe work alternatives, unless they are willing and able to leave the town.

⁸ This closely resembles a three-pronged approach to Critical Revolutionary Pedagogy outlined by Peter McLaren, a celebrated educational scholar, which consists of: demystification – questioning, analyzing, denaturalizing, historicizing and putting into context prevailing common-sense or natural ideas and discourses; opposition – forming one's own position and ideas and defending them; and praxis – acting, putting into motion plans to change and transform the current prevailing system (Morales, M. (2003). The path of dissent: An interview with Peter McLaren. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 1(2), 117-134. doi: 10.1177/1541344603254147).



KEY LEARNINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

INVESTING IN GENDER EQUALITY

The previous section revealed the varying levels and gaps in understanding of Gender Equality and the necessity of challenging discriminatory gender norms that prevent boys and girls from fully and equally exercising their rights in different areas of their lives, through targeted sensitization and awareness-raising. However, it also highlights a readiness and willingness by the youth beneficiaries and stakeholders of the project to begin these types of conversations.

According to a new gender equality marker, which was launched by Save the Children as a global Key Performance Indicator in 2017, all programs should be at the very least gender-sensitive, and preferably Gender Transformative. Therefore, partly thanks to feedback from the current study, the decision was made to invest in a Gender Analysis, and to make gender a cross-cutting theme, as well as adding a specific Gender Equality Intermediate Outcome within the project's Performance Measurement Framework with its own dedicated activities, in order to accelerate progress in this domain. This will contribute to increased access to and control over productive areas of the jewellery-making project and the benefits derived from them for more girls and young women, as well as increase their equal and meaningful participation in the association's decision-making. To this end, girls and boys will strengthen their

technical capacities and life skills, considering their different needs based on the gender analysis conducted, and will be trained on gender equality to engage in communications initiatives that raise awareness about gender equality in their respective communities. This was made possible thanks to additional resources committed by Bulgari in May 2017.

EFFECTIVE GROWTH STRATEGY INCLUDING LOCAL MARKETS TO ENSURE VIABILITY

While the project has provided concrete livelihood opportunities for numerous young people, continued efforts are still needed to ensure the long-term viability of the youth association to enable young men and women to become fully sustained in their daily lives through earnings made. Although youth participants have grown tremendously autonomous in all aspects of their work from jewellery design to material procurement, they do not yet have sufficient channels to sell the goods and need to find other sales avenues to avoid relying solely on artisanal fairs. An effective growth strategy is required so that more youth become involved, more clients are engaged, and key sales channels are developed beyond fairs. Stronger local partnerships and local market opportunities are needed and seem viable given the strong affinity to filigree style

jewellery in the local area. Increased local partnerships are also seen to be key to strengthening the ongoing work of educational institutions in implementing the holistic education plan centered on the filigree jewellery tradition.

Much hope was expressed by interviewees that the signing of Colombia's peace agreement and subsequent state investment in infrastructure as part of the transition to peace – including the completion of the only road connecting Barbacoas to the outside world and providing access to markets – will bring many more opportunities to young people. Recognizing these future opportunities within the current political climate of positive change, a timely, concrete step would be to invest in a comprehensive gender-sensitive market analysis of the area and the jewellery value chain by the project, to ensure that the young jewellers, their associations, and products are competitive and provide a sustainable livelihood.

RISK ASSESSMENT AND MITIGATION TO SAFEGUARD YOUTH

Specific measures were taken early on in the project to secure administrative processes with banks and avoid risks of carrying large quantities of cash, given that extortion is very common in the zone. The project strategy has been closely linked with the school and focused on small sales rather than large sales, with care taken in the communication around project successes. However the project is facing an inherent dilemma in terms of balancing its growth objectives while maintaining a low profile to safeguard youth. On the one hand there is a need to increase the profile of youth and their work in order to build opportunities and sales channels locally. This has been a clear missing piece, with few local community members beyond the educational community and parents being familiar with the jewellery project and the products that are being designed, produced and sold by youth in Barbacoas. Thus, better linkages and partnerships within the local community and municipality would be useful in strengthening the growth and sustainability of the initiative moving forward. On the other hand, however, there is a need to maintain a low profile within the sensitive local context in which the project and youth association operate so as to minimize unwanted attention toward youth and extortion-related threats by dangerous individuals or groups operating in the area. A comprehensive risk mapping and mitigation strategy can be developed to minimize risks to youth relating to multiple components of the operation including the local sales strategy and protection of the physical premises (workshop). Strengthening relations with the mayor's office and educational institutions is seen as key to minimizing security risks while building visibility. To further safeguard youth, refresher trainings on physical safety and improvements in terms of safety procedures and preventive measures can be prioritized.

REACHING THE MOST VULNERABLE

A challenging question for the project moving forward is how to scale up efforts to identify and reach youth who are most at risk. The jewellery-making project is currently reaching three municipalities that have been highly affected by the armed conflict, with a continuing presence of armed groups, drug-traffickers and associated risks of violence and crime. However, the intervention strategy has been focused so far on reaching youth in schools. An important and complementary approach could involve developing a strategy to reach those youth who face even greater vulnerabilities, including out-of-school youth, youth with disabilities, and youth working in hazardous, dangerous or unhealthy working conditions. With the peace process gaining ground, there is hope that the necessary space will be opened up for organizations like Save the Children, along with community-based organizations, to reach these children and youth who were previously unreachable due to the associated high levels of risk. Of course, this would require further resources, in order to develop and implement effective strategies to reach out to and engage with vulnerable youth; as well as to provide viable, sustainable and safe alternatives.

LIFE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

An analysis of the project to date has indicated room to improve the life skills education component, including a strengthened focus on team work and group cohesion, diplomatic communication, democratic decision-making, and conflict resolution. There have been internal conflicts within the youth association with respect to decisions about the distribution of funds, which have caused some members to quit. Moving forward, more effective means of communicating, making decisions, and ensuring equitable power dynamics among members of the youth association will not only be critical to promoting coexistence but also to ensuring the long-term viability of the work. A focus on group cohesion was incorporated in the Guapi expansion project based on lessons from Barbacoas; this has been understood as very relevant and useful. In addition to strengthened group competencies and conflict resolution skills, other complementary strategies that promote coexistence and peaceful relations can also be explored, including socio-emotional regulation approaches such as mindfulness. For example the RESPIRA mindfulness training program⁹ implemented with Colombian teachers and students as part of Save the Children's larger education intervention has demonstrated positive results in anger regulation, reducing reactive aggression, increasing attentive listening and building empathy.

⁹ RESPIRA is an innovative pedagogical program, also supported by Vive la Educación, that seeks to bring a mindfulness practice to public and private schools in Colombia to foster socio-emotional learning and teacher and student well-being. It promotes educational quality by improving peaceful coexistence and academic achievement, particularly in children and young people affected by different types of violence, including armed conflict. For more information, visit convivenciaproductiva.org/respira

COMPLEMENTARY PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

This project operates in a tense and conflict-affected zone where many youth have been affected by violence and conflict, which has left deep scars, and presents obstacles in their journey towards employability and independence. The project could offer a more holistic approach to youth empowerment and employability by providing assistance to overcome personal issues and heal from the experience of violence youth may have encountered. One youth in particular suggested the inclusion of someone from the community who could assist young people dealing with difficulties that arise, which can create a feeling of isolation and hinder the motivation of youth to continue on their pathway towards economic empowerment. An alternative to providing such services could be to set up a referral process enabling young people to access psychosocial support, or to train senior staff or teachers in offering psychological first aid to vulnerable youth.

REPLICABILITY OF APPROACH

This initiative builds transferable skills that are applicable in multiple contexts and vocational areas whether in jewellery-making business or other ventures. While a single model cannot be successfully applied to all places due to different circumstances in different contexts, it is possible that this initiative can be successfully tailored to another place and culture, including applications beyond jewellery-making. The project model can be studied, breaking down its key components to identify those that may be successfully adapted to other contexts where young people are facing economic difficulties including those affected by violence. While the idea to leverage specific cultural capital existing within a given context in order to promote economic empowerment (such as filigree) can be effective, other vocational areas can be integrated based on the resources and opportunities in a given context, including agricultural business ventures. The replicability of such an intervention in supporting peacebuilding in other contexts should also be examined in light of the specific factors that may influence a young person's decision to engage in conflict activities.

DEVELOPING APPROPRIATE MONITORING AND EVALUATION TOOLS

In order to more accurately measure success and build the evidence-base required for replicability and scale-up, it is also necessary to strengthen the project's monitoring and evaluation tools, grounded in a sound theory of change that connects its activities with expected outcomes.¹⁰ Moving forward in the current phase of the project, Save the Children has been prioritizing dedicated program management and technical expertise in the areas of Education, Livelihoods, Gender Equality, and Monitoring and Evaluation, both in Canada and Colombia to develop essential tools including a Logic Model and Performance Measurement Framework integrating specialized, measurable, attainable, relevant and timely indicators and targets. In addition, a number of training and assessment tools are being developed in important areas of the project's implementation such as transferable life-skills, empowerment, employability, entrepreneurship, literacy and gender equality.

10 Global Affairs Canada (2016). *Results-Based Management for International Assistance Programming: A How-to Guide*.



VIDEOS AND ADDITIONAL MATERIAL

- An video published by Save the Children in 2012, describing the project and its context can be found at:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4bzZGFCK7k8>
- An article and a video about the youth's participation in Expo Artesanías in Bogota and Expo Artesano in Medellin can be found at:
<http://www.elspectador.com/noticias/judicial/joyas-vez-de-balas-articulo-609853>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4UjW0uxMB1c>
- For a video summary of the 2016 trip to Italy, by the Mambi Association's president:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nsv1oVnG4Zw>



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